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ABSTRACT

Underlying barriers to adjunct faculty forming effective communities are time and distance; they spend little time on campus, and there is distance, physically and psychologically, from their peers. There can be no hope of challenging and changing the system without the organizing and focusing of energies. Lessons can be learned from big business. It is important to ask whether teaching is the primary goal of the institution and whether the college could function without adjuncts. Included are 12 critical questions that may be used by adjunct faculty in order to promote change in their status. Some examples of the questions are: Whether or not primary benefits, increased pay or an increased number of full-time positions will solve the problem (individually or combined solutions); Whether or not unionization or guilds would solve their problems; and how to respond to administrators in a "employee at will" atmosphere. (Contains 10 references.) (SW)

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# Adjuncts and Their Din of Inequities: Transforming Complaints into Action and Results

Forum on
"Redressing the Profession:
We, They, and the Market"

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## INTRODUCTION

"Change" is the the theme of this convention, and the topic of this forum is "Redressing the Profession: We, They, and the Market." To redress means to set right, to remedy, to make amends to, and to make amends for.

Perhaps at the top of the list of those to whom we should make amends is ourselves, the adjunct (part-time) instructors of America's colleges and universities. We have too long been obeisant to the dictates of, at best, benignly neglectful and, at worst, malignantly exploitive administrations. The last sentence of Cary Nelson's introduction ("Between Crisis and Opportunity") to his just-published Will Teach for Food is: "If we are to resist (the degradation of our mission), we will have to change not only our practices but ourselves."

## HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS

Literature on the status of adjunct faculty is replete with eloquent and impassioned descriptions of our plight, and there is no want of condemnations of the perpetrators of the diminished status of adjuncts. Nor is there a lack of the detailing of hurdles that we adjuncts face in addressing our grievances. "Part-time instructors are to the community colleges as migrant workers are to the farms" say Cohen and Brawer in The American Community College. "Faculties have long been divided into the haves and have-nots . . . (adjuncts are) the gypsy scholars teaching part-time at several institutions for low pay, few benefits and with a back-breaking schedule" Debbie Goldberg said last July in The Washington Post. "(Pay) workers as little as possible and deny employee benefits any time you can get away with it . . . " Nelson says is the credo of many administrators. "Almost anything that even suggested a more permanent or respectable connection to the university was contemptuously opposed" says Rutgers adjunct English instructor Karen Thompson.

And there can be no doubt that the environment for adjuncts continues to worsen. The percentage of courses being taught by part-time instructors has at least doubled in the past twenty years. Last September, David R. Williams, an adjunct instructor in the English Department at George Mason University, stated in the Washington Post that 60% of that department's courses are taught by part-timers. That figure sits in stark contrast to the 19 percent of the American work force that is part-time (an increase of about three per cent in the same twenty years).

## HARBINGERS, OR FLEETING HOPES?

However, there are some possible harbingers of an improved climate and various means to affect change.

First, in October of 1996 the Reading, ESL, Foreign Languages and Philosophy Department at the Rockville Campus of Montgomery

College launched a pro-active "faculty focus group" to "engage in an ongoing dialogue about improving our channels of communication" to close the gap between full- and part-timers and to explore ways of delivering an improved pedagogical product to the student in the classroom. That effort soon became known as the Faculty Integration Initiative (FII), and is co-chaired by Usha Venkatesh and this author, respectively full- and part-time instructors in the department.[1] The FII conducted a 19-item anonymous survey of 52 department adjuncts, almost 60% of whom responded.

The results of the survey painted a portrait of adjuncts whose chief complaint was a feeling of estrangement. When asked about their influence at the course, department, and college levels, 66, 83 and 86 per cent (respectively) said they have little or no influence. Seventy per cent feel that the college does not show its appreciation of their work. Eighty per cent feel that they are not part of the academic community. Eighty-four per cent would prefer a full-time position if it were available. Fifty-eight per cent have their own e-mail addresses, and all of them feel that "the Internet could be an effective communication avenue . . . ."

The committee consequently made suggestions to the chair. The chair subsequently modified them into her own recommendations shortly before assuming another position at the college.

While the FII findings are dispiriting, at least two hopeful elements are embedded in them.

One element is that some members of the hierarchy of Montgomery College did demonstrate constructive concern about adjuncts.

The other element is the, as mentioned, nearly 60 percent of adjuncts who have e-mail addresses. If there is a medium by which and in which adjuncts can create communicating cohorts, it is the Internet.

The communicating and coalescing power of the Internet was demonstrated last month by the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the International Campaign to Ban Land-mines (ICBL). As reported by Dana Priest, the ICBL is a grass-roots organization that over a 14-month period coordinated the global efforts of 250 organizations. Recognizing that "communication was critical," the group was able to marshal public concern and so far has the endorsements of 89 countries.

Most community college faculty and virtually all four-year college and university faculty have an e-mail address and can access the World-Wide Web (WWW)).

A second harbinger may be in the "Call for Action" article by Courtney Leatherman last month in the Chronicle of Higher Education. Twenty disparate educators from around the U.S met in Washington, D.C. in September and focused on " . . . the heavy reliance on part-

time professors in academe (that) has shortchanged undergraduates and weakened teaching, not to mention the exploit(ation) of many adjuncts." And David Adamany, president of Wayne State University, is quoted as saying in his paper titled "Let Us Praise Adjunct Faculty" that academe is in denial about America's " . . .concerns about . . . the quality of education, and productivity."

Leatherman goes on to quote Ernst Benjamin of the American Association of University Professors (A.A.U.P) who " . . . wants to put the screws to administrators, forcing them to pay part-timers at a proportional rate to that of full-timers." Also mentioned is 20-year Rutgers adjunct Karen Thompson's call for a document "'with teeth'- no more simple resolutions and pleas.'" Thompson suggests public censure of institutions that do not "follow good practices for adjuncts," and praise for those that do.

A third harbinger came into view with today's issue of the Chronicle. Courtney Leatherman reports on a complaint filed with the U.S. Education Department by a State of Washington community college instructor, Keith Hoeller. Dr. Hoeller complains that the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges "has failed to uphold its own standards governing the use of part-time faculty members . . . ." Those standards say that it is "'vitally important' for faculty members to receive salaries and benefits 'to enable them to live with dignity and comfort.'" Since 1990 Dr. Hoeller has routinely "taught (a dozen) philosophy and psychology (courses a year) at four community colleges" and enjoys a gross income of $25,000 for his efforts.

But while there may be some indications that a few chairs and administrators in higher education may be experiencing a shift in awareness of the petrified second-class status of adjuncts in the calcified two-tier system, and the egregious degree that that status impacts on the quality of instruction delivered to the classroom student, it can be scarcely hoped that actions will come from that quarter.

There is no want of problem defining and solution proposing. For well over a decade adjuncts have been reciting the wrongs inflicted on them by "morally numb and indifferent leaders," as writer Barbara Ehrenrich describes them. It has become a futile and monotonous din of inequities. While there may be sparse pockets of minor successes, it appears that the two salient barriers to adjuncts forming effective communities - time and distance - have, thus far, proven unsurmountable. Time in that we can, or do, spend so little of it on the campuses at which we teach, and distance in that we are so far removed, physically and psychologically, from our peers.

In contrast, the presence of those two factors goes far to demonstrate the increasing successes on at least 20 campuses of graduate teaching assistants (TA's) in organizing and gaining

redress with their issues, which are much the same as those of adjuncts. There can be no hope of challenging and changing the system without the organizing and focusing of energies.

There are dynamics and vehicles plainly in view that auger well for adjuncts to band together and surmount barriers and confront the deeply entrenched status quo.

## LESSONS FROM BIG BUSINESS

"'Reinventing' the University: Object Lessons From Big Business" may not sound like it could be of much value to adjuncts. Written by Richard J. Mahoney, an ex-CEO of Monsanto and currently the Distinguished Executive in Residence at the Center for the Study of American Business at Washington University, one might expect to hear paeans to out-sourcing and down-sizing. While some of Mr. Mahoney's ideas may be seen to be anathematic to adjuncts, he asks two powerful questions. The answers to these two questions may be of profound value to adjuncts, and to any school as a collegial whole.

Mahoney's first question is, "What is the primary goal of the institution? . . . If the answer is teaching, are 90 per cent of the institution's discretionary funds (those not absolutely fully obligated) spent on programs related to teaching? If not, why not?"[2]

The second question is based on zero-based budgeting. The litmus test any zero-based budgeter asks is, "Could we function without this element?" Or, as Mahoney puts it, "If we didn't already have this activity now, would we start? And if we would, where would it rank in priority for scarce funds?"

If the answer to the first question - What is the primary goal? - is to educate students with increasingly competent, motivated and valued faculty, then the answer to the second question - Where do adjuncts rank in priority? - would have to auger well for adjuncts.

How well could the English Department at George Mason University function without adjuncts? How well could any adjunct's department and institution function without adjuncts? Cary Nelson's answer is that " . . . higher education as a whole has become structurally dependent on a pool of cheap labor to teach its lower-level courses (p. 5).[3]

The strike against the UPS by the Teamsters is another lesson for adjuncts. When the strike was successfully settled, some Monday morning pundits opined that one of the hole cards of the union was that every UPS driver in the country comes in contact with many of his or her customers every week. We adjuncts come in contact with our constituency once, twice or three times a week for 12 weeks. Without being righteous or obnoxious about it, but simply, and in a straight forward manner, we can educate our constituents about the basics of the problem.

We could use an example the woman Nelson speaks of, who, as a TA at the University of Illinois, earned about $2,800 per course.



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When she completed her doctorate and became an adjunct her pay was cut in half. Can we imagine a more ludicrous scene than telling a police sergeant, or an airline co-pilot, "Now that you have acquired all that training, now that you have all that experience, now that you have earned the credentials of a captaincy, we are going to cut your pay in half. You are now worth to us half of what you used to be worth. And don't complain about it - you have nice letters behind your name"?

Most adjuncts love their profession. We are hired to do a job that we are trained and qualified to do, a job that requires a high level of experience and education. But we are not paid fairly. The status problem of being an adjunct is one of income, not ability.

## OWNERSHIP

How many of our students know that we are part-time, that we teach the same courses and do precisely the same work for 40% of the pay? What percentage of our students even know what an "adjunct" is? How many of us have decreased self-esteem, if not shame, for being adjuncts?

Indeed, what is our own definition of "adjunct"? Does it serve any effort of redressing to differentiate between a retired professional who teaches a course or two and who has relatively little investment in pay, benefits and a full-time position and an adjunct who teaches 3-7 courses at two or three campuses and who has great interest in adequate pay and benefits and full-time employment?

At one end of the spectrum is the instructor who is motivated almost solely by the joy of teaching. At the other end of the spectrum is the younger or newer instructor who is motivated not only by the rewards of a classroom of students but as well by the need to make a fair salary. At both ends of the spectrum and at all points in between are teachers and TA's who teach because they love teaching. It may be that any effort at equity that does not see the entire spectrum as essentially one homogeneous whole would play into the hands of those administrators whose primary tactic to resist equity for adjuncts is to divide and conquer.

## SHALL WE "JUST DO IT"?

It may be that now is the time for this country's adjuncts to answer some critical questions. These might be among them:

1 - Is it primarily benefits, increased pay, or an increased number of full-time jobs that we need? Or all three?

2 - Do we want to go it alone, or do we want to work in concert with our TA and full-time colleagues? Are our interests best served working in isolation, or working in close and common alliances? To what extent are we willing to subordinate individual ambition to collegial welfare?

3 - Are we willing to be more accountable to our department and schools in our effectiveness as instructors? Are we willing to become greater parts of the woof and warp of our department's and school's academic and social fabric?

4 - Since almost all of us teach on a work-for-hire basis (and therefore can be not rehired with no reason given), how can we protect ourselves from retribution by ill-intended administrators when we actively participate in a campaign of protest and education?

5 - Does redressing inevitably lead to unionization, which often means protracted, and expensive battles with administrations? Is it folly to entertain the hope that most administrations would positively and substantially respond to adjunct guilds? Could guilds which have as their modi operandi objective and well-intended collegiality and clear, direct, and substantial communication be effective?

6 - Do we want to work with our full-time colleagues on our campuses in arranging a "Salute to Adjuncts Week?"

7 - "Expendable," "disposable," "gypsy," and "have-nots" are frequently used to describe adjuncts. To what extent does "servile" describe us?

8 - If indeed America's academy is structurally dependent upon adjuncts, do we adjuncts not have much more power than we suppose? Is our problem a lack of clout, or an illusion of fear?

9 - We all have the image in our heads of Gary Trudeau's Doonesbury comic strip depicting Dean Evans, hatchet man for President King of Walden College, standing in the back of stake-bed truck (or is it a cattle pen that he is in?). Megaphone in hand, he's conducting last-minute hires from a gaggle of adjuncts who have abdicated everything but their desire to teach. In our mind's eye can we create the next strip, in which President King is sitting at his desk and saying "My God, adjuncts teach 50 per cent of my courses! What if they ALL got mad at once?

10 - And can we imagine even the <u>next</u> strip, with King peering through the blinds at a rally of the school's adjuncts. Their placards read "Equity for adjuncts," and in unison they are chanting "We're mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore."

11 - Are we willing, as a cohort, to take a stand? Where will we take that stand? In our classrooms? On our campuses? In our communities? Do we have the fiber to take a stand even at the national level? Are we willing to all stand together on a given day and make our concerns known to the nation? Having taken our message to our students, dare we stand together on a given day (say the first Tuesday of next October) and make our concerns known to the nation?

12 - Could an adjunct World-Wide Web (WWW) site galvanize adjuncts on a national basis? What words could we use in its title? Initiative? Equity?

"Change," has as synonyms "flow," and "tide." The Mahoney article, "'Reinventing' the University," closes with a quote of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

*"To reach port, we must sail -*
*sail, not lie at anchor -*
*sail, not drift."*

Are we adjuncts going to lie at anchor? Will we continue to just drift on tides not of our making?

Or are we going to set sail?

## NOTES

1. I am also an adjunct instructor at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA at the English Language Institute and Communication Department, and a doctoral candidate in communication and teaching a second language.

2. This most fundamental of questions seems often to get lost in the maze of issues that swirl in discussions of today's higher education campus. Roueche and Milliron state it succinctly: "Successful colleges assess the value of their actions by one overarching evaluative criteria - Is it good for the student?

3. As well, Judith M. Gappa and David W. Leslie state in their The Invisible Faculty that "These institutions have improved their academic programs *because* they employ part-time faculty, not in spite of their part-time faculty . . . This is our concluding message: a college or university strengthens itself through the wise use of part-time faculty."

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